

## Mine countermeasures ships deploy for east, west coasts

Story, photos by Mike Antoine

Five ships of Mine Countermeasures Squadron Two are now safely deployed as part of Mine Warfare Readiness Group One.

Three ships, USS Robin (MHC 54), USS Kingfisher (MHC 56), and USS Black Hawk (MHC 558), pulled up anchor March 2 for a six-month deployment that will take them to the Western Atlantic Operating Area. While deployed, they will be conducting mine countermeasures operations along the eastern seaboard, and visiting New York City during Fleet Week in May.

USS Avenger (MCM 1) and USS Defender (MCM 2) deployed March 9, for a six-month stretch to conduct mine countermeasures operations in the Southern California Operating Area. The two ships will participate in Rim of the Pacific Exercise 2004 near Hawaii in June.

"My husband – my best friend – is going away for a while," said Brenda Ward, wife of ET3 Brian Ward, of USS Defender (MCM 2). "I'm afraid the kids won't remember him when he comes back." The Wards have two young children.

"I'm nervous for both of us," said Christie Curtis, a Naval Reservist with Supply Management Assistance Team Det. 103 at NAS Corpus Christi. She was bidding farewell to her fiancé, DC2 Peter Martinez, aboard *Defender*.

"This is always hard," said Sue Corbitt, wife of BM2 Mike Corbitt, of *Defender*. "It's his last deployment. I'm glad."

Barbara Kaska, wife of PN1(AW) Steve Kaska, of USS Avenger (MCM 1), has her own take on the situation. "When I married him, I knew there be times when he'd be gone – I knew what I was getting into," she said. "Besides, I'll be staying pretty busy – I'm the ship's ombudsman. I'll be too busy to be lonely."

CAPT George Croy, commodore of Mine Countermeasures Squadron Two, knows what the wives and families left home are going through.

"I recognize their service to the country in the same way that I recognize their husbands' service," Croy said. "And once those ships disappear over the horizon, our concern for the families doesn't lessen – it becomes stronger."